

# Flu and Flu Vaccination 2010-2011

## Frequently Asked Questions for Vermont State Employees/Retirees

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## *Vermont State Employees' Flu Vaccination Clinics*

### Who can come to the Vermont State Employee Flu Clinics?

Active, retired and temporary state employees, regardless of their insurance coverage, are eligible. This includes members of the Vermont Council on the Arts, Film Corporation, VSEA and Historical Society. Contractors, spouses & children of state employees are not eligible for vaccinations at these sites. Check with your provider, your local paper or visit [http://www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/flu/flu\\_clinics.aspx](http://www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/flu/flu_clinics.aspx) for other flu clinics.

### How much does it cost?

There is no co pay and no out-of-pocket cost to participants for the vaccination. Those with CIGNA through the state or Medicare/Medicaid as their primary insurance must provide their insurance numbers when they register for reimbursement purposes.

### Where can I get a shot?

Clinics will be offered at 25 sites throughout Vermont. A schedule with exact locations, dates, and times will be made available on our website at:

[http://humanresources.vermont.gov/benefits/wellness/flu\\_program](http://humanresources.vermont.gov/benefits/wellness/flu_program) on September 7th and will also be distributed through your HR Managers and Administrators and through the mail to retirees.

### Do I have to take sick, personal or vacation time to get my shot at a worksite clinic?

The Vermont State Employees' Wellness Program has requested that agency and department heads allow flexibility in work schedules so that employees may attend worksite clinics. Because each worksite is different, it is at the manager's discretion. There is no mileage reimbursement. If you choose to receive your shot at a location other than the official state clinic sites, you will need to use leave time.

### When and how do I register?

Starting September 7th, register anytime online at <https://vt.healthyachievers.com>. You will also receive information through your HR Managers and Administrators and through the mail (for retirees). The deadline for registration at a particular site will be 24 hours before the scheduled clinic (Thursday for a Monday clinic.) Appointment slots will be filled on a first come, first served basis.

Telephone registration will also be available for those with no computer access (Monday – Friday, 8AM – 8PM). The phone number is 1-866-868-1341 and *Healthy Achievers* is our vendor. Ask to register for a "State of VT Flu Shot". After hours, please leave a message and your call will be returned during regular office times.

All registration information, schedules, directions vaccine information sheet and frequently asked questions will also be available on the State Employees' Wellness Program website at:

[http://humanresources.vermont.gov/benefits/wellness/flu\\_program](http://humanresources.vermont.gov/benefits/wellness/flu_program).

### Will my personal/insurance information be safe and protected?

Yes, *Healthy Achievers* (our vendor) is a designated health provider and is approved to bill Medicare/Medicaid and other insurers for covered services, such as flu. All patient information is protected under strict HIPAA privacy regulations and their website is SSL secured.

### Will other people have the same appointment time as me?

Yes, multiple people will have the same appointment time as you. It should only about 15 minutes to complete the process and there will be more than one nurse vaccinating at the same time.

### Will you accept walk ins?

We will try our best to accommodate walk-ins, but **scheduled appointments will have top priority**. We cannot guarantee that there will be time or vaccine available for walk-ins on any given day. If you choose to walk in, there may be a long wait time or you may be asked to come back at another time. Walk-ins must have your insurance card (Medicare, CIGNA), if applicable, and proof of eligibility.

### Who is administering the flu shots?

All vaccinations will be given by VT Licensed Nurses who are employed by our vendor, *Occupational Health Strategies, Inc. DBA Healthy Achievers*. This vendor was chosen through a full State bid process.

### How will my privacy be protected?

All of the nurses administering shots are bound by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Health information will be protected and treated as confidential.

Flu shots will be given in large open conference rooms and many employees will be receiving shots at the same time. The flu shot must be given into the muscle of your upper arm. To ensure your own comfort and the timely administration of your shot, please remember to wear something that will give the vaccinator easy access to your arm. A limited number of privacy screens will be available for those who need them.

### How will I know if I am eligible to receive a shot?

When you register, you will receive a release form with a series of questions. The purpose of this form is to identify those who are not eligible to receive the shot due to allergy or other medical reasons. If you are unsure, please check with your health care provider prior to coming to a clinic. The nurse will review your paperwork with you before giving your shot. Non-State employees (spouses, children, contractors, etc.) are not eligible for vaccinations at these clinic sites.

### What if I am sick on the day of my appointment?

CDC guidelines state that if you are sick with a fever when you go to get a flu shot, you should talk to your health care provider about getting your shot at a later date as the vaccination may be less effective. However, you can get a flu shot at the same time you have a respiratory illness without fever or if you have another mild illness.

### How do I cancel or reschedule my appointment?

If you registered on-line, go to: <https://vt.healthyachievers.com> and log in as a **Returning User** with your email address and password. This will bring you to the final registration page. Follow the steps below to cancel, reschedule your time or choose another site.

To cancel your registration, click on the red button at the bottom to "Cancel Registration." The system will ask you to confirm that you want all your information to be deleted at that time.

To change your scheduled appointment time, click on "Make Changes" at the bottom of the page. This will bring you back to your registration page. Re-enter your password and click on "Next." This will bring you to Step #2, "Services." Click on "Select another time." Choose your new time by clicking on it. Verify your time was changed and then click on "Next." Your new time should show up for confirmation. Follow through and click on "Finish" to complete this change.

To change your site, click on “Select Another Event” at the top of the page. This will bring you to the schedule page. Click on the new event you plan to attend. The system will ask you to confirm, so click on the red button, “Yes, Cancel Previous Registration.” It will then bring you to your registration page. Click “Next.” You will now see the new site with the times available. Select a time and click on “Next”. Follow through and click on “Finish” to complete this change.

What should I do if I forgot my password?

If you registered on-line, go to: <https://vt.healthychievers.com> and log in as a **Returning User** with your email address. Click on the statement: “If you forgot your password, click here”. This will bring you to a new screen where you should verify that you have inserted the correct email address. Your password will be emailed to you in approximately 15 minutes. If you continue to have trouble, contact the Wellness program at 802-241-1536 or email us at [DHR-EmpWellness@state.vt.us](mailto:DHR-EmpWellness@state.vt.us)

What should I expect with the actual process of getting vaccinated?

Vaccine and all related supplies will be handled according to strict CDC guidelines. All vaccinators are VT Licensed nurses and are very well-trained in the proper administration of vaccines as well as the handling and disposal of the related supplies.

All of the nurses administering shots will use hand sanitizer between employee vaccinations. If they (nurses) have cuts or breaks in their skin, they will wear gloves to protect themselves from possible contact with blood when giving a shot. Nurses wearing gloves will also use hand sanitizer and will change gloves between employees.

Vaccines are administered using sterile disposable syringes. They are for one time use only. Nurses often will pre-fill syringes and you may see them on the table. These are not used syringes. Once a syringe has been used, it will be disposed of in a container specifically for this purpose. Before giving a shot, the nurse will prepare the area with alcohol. The shot will be administered in the upper muscle of your arm. All recipients will receive a bandage at the injection site.

What should I bring/wear to the flu clinic?

Be sure to bring a completed signed copy of the flu release form, your health insurance card(s) for verification (if you are covered by CIGNA and/or Medicare) and proof of state employment eligibility. If you completed your registration process by phone or on-line, you only need fill out the top section, sign and date it.

Please wear appropriate clothing to allow access to your upper arm.

May I arrive early for my shot?

You may arrive early, but understand that no vaccinations will be given prior to the advertised start of the clinic and appointments scheduled before yours will be given priority.

Will I be asked to wait after my shot?

Individuals who have had a flu shot before will not be required to wait, but are welcome to do so. Participants who are receiving the flu shot for the first time will be asked to wait for 15 minutes. Clinic nurses are well-trained to respond to an adverse reaction and will have appropriate aids available.

*The Flu and the Flu Shot*

What is the seasonal flu?

Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine protect me against H1N1

Yes. The 2010-2011 flu vaccine will protect against 2009 H1N1, and two other influenza viruses. The viruses in the vaccine change each year based on international surveillance and scientists' estimations about which types and strains of viruses will circulate in a given year. Years of testing are required by law before a vaccine can be licensed. Once licensed and in use, vaccines are continuously monitored for safety, quality and effectiveness by both the CDC and FDA. To learn more about flu, visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).

#### How do people become infected with the flu?

Seasonal flu spreads mainly from person-to-person through contact. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, the nasal secretions containing the flu virus can get into the air or onto surfaces. An individual may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching his/her mouth or nose.

Some important facts:

- The virus can remain active on surfaces for two to eight hours.
- Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 days after becoming sick.
- **You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.**

#### Who should get a flu shot?

In 2010, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices voted for "universal" flu vaccination in the United States. This group of vaccine experts recommends that anyone over 6 months of age receive a flu vaccination in order to expand protection throughout the country.

Groups at higher risk are as follows:

- Children ages 6 months through 18 years
- Anyone 65 years of age and older
- Pregnant women
- People with certain medical conditions such as:
  - Weakened immune systems
  - Blood disorders
  - Respiratory disorders
  - Muscle/nerve disorder
  - Cardiovascular disorders
  - Metabolic disorders, such as diabetes
  - Morbid obesity (BMI over 30)
- Household contacts/caregivers of children under 6 months of age, over 50 or anyone at high risk due to a medical condition
- Health care workers
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities

#### Who should **not** get a flu shot?

- Anyone who has ever had a severe allergic reaction to eggs
- Anyone who has ever had a severe allergic reaction to a previous flu shot
- Children younger than 6 months of age
- Anyone who has a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome (a paralytic nerve disease)
- If you are sick with a fever the day of your appointment, you should talk to your health care provider about getting your shot at a later date, as the vaccine may be less effective. However, you can get a

flu shot at the same time you have a respiratory illness without fever or if you have another mild illness.

- Anyone under these categories should speak with their health care provider before getting a shot.

#### Why should I get a flu shot?

Each year over 36,000 people in the U.S. die and over 200,000 people are hospitalized from complications of the seasonal flu. Traditionally, the risk of serious complications has been most pronounced in populations that are elderly or have compromised immune systems. However, last year's H1N1 pandemic hit those in the age range of 18-64 hardest. It is estimated that the pandemic resulted in 12,000 deaths.

The flu shot is 70-90% effective in preventing the flu and spreading the virus to others. Receiving the shot increases the chance that individuals will stay healthy, lose fewer days of work, and enjoy more days of play. Even if you do get the flu, your symptoms will be much less severe and will not last as long as someone who was not vaccinated.

#### When is a good time to get a flu shot?

The best time to get a flu shot is prior to the start of the flu season, which runs from November through May. It is possible to get the shot at any time during the flu season. Vermont state employee flu vaccination clinics will run at locations throughout the state from October 1-November 10.

It is important to note that the effectiveness of the vaccine declines throughout the year and is only considered effective for the current flu season. Vaccines are changed yearly in response to the most common virus strains that are present in the environment.

#### Will I get sick from the flu shot?

No. The vaccine is made from dead (non-active) flu virus that will not cause the flu. Side effects are possible, although the majority of people who receive a flu shot have no serious problems from it. Some common side effects are: soreness and/or swelling at the injection site, fever, fatigue, muscle aches, sore throat or cough. These minor side effects can last for 1 or 2 days.

On rare occasions, flu shots can cause serious problems such as severe allergic reaction usually within a few minutes to a few hours. Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness. Seek immediate medical attention and contact your health care provider if these symptoms occur.

#### What should I do if I have a severe allergic reaction?

If a severe reaction occurs after you have left the flu vaccination clinic, call 911 or seek emergency assistance immediately and contact your primary care provider.

#### I heard that the flu vaccine contains mercury. Is that true?

Yes. Multi-dose flu vaccine contains trace amounts of the preservative thimerosal, which is a mercury derivative. It is important to note that there is no convincing evidence that the low doses of thimerosal found in flu vaccines cause harm to adults or to the developing fetuses of pregnant women who received the vaccine.

Those with "sensitivity" to thimerosal may experience a minor local reaction like redness and swelling at the injection site. The risk of influenza related complications outweighs the risk of adverse reactions with thimerosal. Limited quantities of thimerosal-free influenza vaccine will be available in single doses.

#### What is the chance that I will get the flu despite getting a shot?

Each year, a new vaccine is created to protect against the three most common strains of virus from the prior year. It is estimated that these strains will account for 70-90% of the flu that year. This means you still have some (10-30%) chance of getting the flu, even if you are vaccinated. However, your symptoms will be much less severe and will not last as long as someone who was not vaccinated.

It takes two weeks for protection to develop after you have received the shot. If you get the flu shortly after receiving the shot, it may mean that you were exposed to the virus before you were vaccinated or in the two week period before the shot is considered effective.

#### For how long is the flu shot protective against the flu?

Protection lasts up to a year. It is important to get vaccinated annually, as the most common strains of virus change from year to year.

#### What else can I do to protect myself and others against the flu?

- When you cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or upper sleeve (not your hands). If you use a tissue, throw the tissue in the trash after you use it and wash your hands.
- Wash your hands often for approximately 20 seconds with soap and warm water. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. It is especially important to wash your hands after you cough or sneeze, when dealing with food or after using the bathroom.
- Drink lots of liquids.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Try not to touch your nose, mouth, or eyes.
- Try to avoid contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, stay home to avoid spreading illness in your workplace.

#### What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms include:

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| • fever >101F   | • dry cough          |
| • sore throat   | • headache           |
| • chills  | • muscle aches       |
| • extreme fatigue   | • runny, stuffy nose |
| • loss of appetite  |                      |
| • stomach symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and sometimes diarrhea |                      |

#### What should I do if I get the flu?

Please stay home if you are sick! The CDC recommends that you stay home from work for 7 days after symptoms begin, or until you are symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. To keep from infecting others, it is important to limit contact.

Most healthy people recover from the flu without complications. Here are some ideas to put you on the road to recovery:

- Get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco.
- Consider over-the-counter (OTC) medications to relieve the symptoms of the flu (Check with your primary provider first if you take other medications or have other health conditions. Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever).
- Remember that serious illness from the flu is more likely in certain groups of people, including people 65 and older, pregnant women, people with certain chronic medical conditions and young children.

- Take flu anti-viral medications if your doctor prescribes them. These medications are most effective when used early (within the first two days of symptoms) and are generally recommended for those who are at high risk of flu-related complications.
- Consult your doctor early on for the best treatment, but also be aware of emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention.

What are the signs of serious complications with the flu and what should be done about them?

**In children**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

**In adults**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

**Seek emergency medical care** if you or someone you know is experiencing any of the signs above.

Where can I find additional information about the flu and the flu shot?

- Vermont State Employees' Wellness Program: 802-241-1536; Email: [DHR-EmpWellness@state.vt.us](mailto:DHR-EmpWellness@state.vt.us).
- Vermont Department of Health Immunization Program: 1-800-640-4374/ 802-863-7638 or visit them at: <http://healthvermont.gov>.
- U.S Department of Health and Human Services: 1-800-232-4636/888-232-6348 (TTY) Email: [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov) or visit them at: [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)
- Information in other languages at [http://www.immunize.org/vis/vis\\_fluinactive.asp](http://www.immunize.org/vis/vis_fluinactive.asp)